

South Plainfield firm pushed to pave over PCB-tainted gravel

By Bridget Malone

STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Residents of South Plainfield and workers at the Hamilton Industrial Park have held their breath long enough.

The gravel in the driveway and parking areas at the complex has been identified by the Environmental Protection Agency as containing polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, which are hazardous to human health. To contain the waste and reduce the health risk, the federal agency ordered Cornell-Dubilier Electronics Inc., the site's primary polluter, to pave over the gravel.

DSC of Newark Corp., the site's current owner, which officials said is partially responsible for paying for the cleanup, originally submitted a plan in May to pave the driveway. Once the contractor learned of the hazardous material, the company refused to do the job, officials said. The federal agency said another company has agreed to do the work and will begin Monday.

Rep. Bob Franks (R-7th Dist.) yesterday toured the site, which is on 25 acres off Hamilton Boulevard. Franks urged the federal agency to use strict measures to ensure that the job gets done as soon as possible.

"Should there be a failure of the project again, I'd like the most severe financial penalty to be imposed," the congressman said. "I'd love to see the company here next Monday and watch these guys pave the property."

State officials have been aware for 10 years that the Hamilton Industrial Park has been contaminated. Harmful levels of PCBs and heavy metals were found on site after the EPA investigated. PCBs were used as coolants and lubricants but haven't been manufactured in the United States since 1977 due to environmental and health risks.

The EPA also ordered Cornell-Dubilier to fence off areas with known contamination and limit contaminants in the Bound Brook from surface water runoff.

Eric Wilson, an on-scene coordinator with the federal environmental agency, said PCBs also have been found in the 19 buildings. "We're going to work on the immediate problems and look beyond that to the long term," he said.

The approximately 200 employees have had extensive organ and blood tests, which came back showing them free of contaminants. But PCBs are believed to be a cause of cancer, which health officials say may develop over time.

"Our concern is that this is an old facility with no air conditioning, only fans," said Mayor Daniel J. Gallagher. "The back is used to load trucks, which stirs up the gravel and gets sucked into the buildings by the fans."

EPA officials also are testing water, fish and sediment samples from the New Market Pond, which is fed by the Bound Brook. The EPA expects those results by mid-August.

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